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**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations**

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**"Combating Human Trafficking: Achieving Zero Tolerance"**

**by**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, it is both an honor and a privilege to have an opportunity to be here today, and to present the following testimony for this extremely important hearing on combating human trafficking, and to work towards zero tolerance.

I am especially pleased to be here to testify because through commendable work such as yours and many other interested, dedicated people, the issue of human trafficking has garnered increasing and welcomed attention. Much of that attention and awareness-building has generally focused on trafficking of eastern European women and Asian women and girls. The issue of Trafficking in African Women and Children, has in general, received less attention and as a result less corresponding development of programs to combat the activity and assist the victims. Let me underline that I do not attach any "orders of magnitude" in terms of focusing attention on victims of trafficking. It is a heinous violation of human rights for any victim. Nonetheless, this hearing provides a welcome chance to bring the issue of Trafficking in African Women and Children to the attention of a wide audience.

Through previous hearings such as yours, many of us have begun to grasp the import and devastating impact of human trafficking on our global society. It is a billion dollar illicit industry--third only to drug trafficking and small arms trafficking. And it is rapidly growing. Unfortunately, hard data are difficult to obtain due to the clandestine nature of human trafficking; and total, aggregate numbers of African women and children trafficked are not definitive. However, through observation, and an array of studies in the last few years, a sharper image of Trafficking in African Women and Children has developed.

Reasons for Trafficking in African Women and Children are manifold, and vary from country to country. The most basic and general reasons are poverty and economic hardship. In some instances, corrupt governments and government officials play a part. Other factors include social disruption, political instability, natural disasters, armed conflict, social customs and mores, familial pressures, and the global demand for cheap, vulnerable labor. It should be noted that in many African countries, decisive steps are being taken to address this terrible problem. African governments working with cooperating international organizations, NGOs, grass-roots volunteer groups are among those who actively participate in anti-trafficking programs. Further on in this presentation, I refer to specific groups that may be of interest to you.

In an in-depth study done by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre entitled, "*Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, in Africa*", September 2003, some of the out-puts and conclusions were that Trafficking in African women and children is a cheap, easy access to child labor and exploitation of children and women for prostitution; Western Europe, the US, Canada, and the Middle East (ex. Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, UAE, Bahrain) are major destination points for most victims trafficked out of Africa. NOTE: There are no reliable figures on how many African girls and women are trafficked into

the US, but anecdotal information, including recent newspaper articles, points to a large, clandestine operation of African girls imported to work as unpaid servants. They are often forced into prostitution. END NOTE. Out of 53 African countries UNICEF surveyed, at least 49% responded that human trafficking existed in their respective countries, and the problem requires effective action, targeted programs and strategies, and intra-African cooperation. Trafficking in African children appears more widespread than trafficking in women. The number of African countries reporting trafficking in children is two times the number reporting trafficking in women. And just to give you an example of the "globalization" of trafficking of African women and children: Young South African women are lured into prostitution and shipped as far away as Macau, according to a report from the International Organization on Migration (IOM).

Here's a brief regional overview of Human Trafficking in Africa: The UN reports that at least 200,000 children are trafficked annually out of West and Central Africa; the U.S. Department of State estimates that as many as 400,000 children are involved in child labor across West Africa based on baseline estimates (Mark Taylor, US State Dept./NCM Report). Benin, Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Nigeria, Togo are West African countries with high levels of trafficking of child laborers. Many of these children have never had identification papers such as birth certificates, thereby facilitating the traffickers operations. In the case of Nigeria, a great number of young Nigerian women are sent to Italy via very well-organized illegal operations. Many of the trafficked women are from the Edo and Delta states. Several Nigerian organizations actively fight trafficking in women and children, including the Women Trafficking and Children Labor Education Foundation (WOTCLEF), headed by the wife of the Vice President of Nigeria. The wife of the Governor of Edo State heads a similar organization—Ida Renaissance. The Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), whose Executive Director is Mrs. Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi has done outstanding work in the rehabilitation of trafficking victims.

In Central and Southern Africa, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zambia are considered "Source" countries for trafficking activities. Several among them are also considered high "Transit" countries for trafficking.

Human Trafficking into and out of South Africa provides a prime example of the extent of human trafficking operations. South Africa is a rich, dynamic, vanguard country in Africa. It naturally attracts a high influx of people from all over Africa, and indeed, the world. Unfortunately, many are criminal elements. Women and children worldwide are trafficked into and out of South Africa. Example: Girls from South Africa are trafficked to brothels in the Netherlands; girls from Thailand are trafficked to South African brothels; women from rural China are brought to South Africa for prostitution; women are flown to Johannesburg and then taken to Swaziland, Lesotho, or Mozambique, then cross the border by road back into South Africa to circumvent airport immigration controls. Eastern European women, controlled by the Russian mafia, take a similar route (Source: iafrica.com). Much to the dismay of South African police authorities who must



try to cope with the problem, a large coterie of organized crime groups operate in South Africa, including Nigerian gangs, Japanese Yakuza, Russian mafia. In Cape Town, the children's rights group, Molo Songololo works with homeless children. It is estimated that at least 25% of the prostitutes in Cape Town are children.

IOM reports that as many as 30,000 teen-age Ethiopian girls arrive in Lebanon and are then trafficked worldwide. The main reasons for trafficking are for sexual exploitation and forced domestic labor. An encouraging step towards ameliorating this problem has been taken by the Ethiopian Government along with USAID: a center funded by USAID was recently opened in Addis Ababa to help rehabilitate trafficked victims.

Though no direct link between HIV/AIDS and Trafficking in African Women and Children has yet been established, it is believed that each contributes to the other. The fear of infection with HIV/AIDS among customers in the sex industry, has driven traffickers to recruit younger and younger women and girls, erroneously perceived by customers to be too young to be infected.

As I stated earlier, African states have not been passive in addressing the issue of human trafficking. Several have initiated measures to curb trafficking: Mali and Cote d'Ivoire set up a commission to study child trafficking; Nigeria's President, Olusgun Obasanjo signed a law in July, 2003, prescribing stiff sentences to trafficking perpetrators, including life in prison. Benin enacted a law in 1995 to regulate the travel of children under 14 years old; and Benin and Togo have agreed to programs to rehabilitate trafficking victims. However, there is much more that must be done. Here are some recommendations:

African countries, with cooperation and assistance from international organizations, the US and other countries, should continue to develop and enforce more effective anti-trafficking and child labor laws. This includes reinforced programs with the African Union, NEPAD and other African organizations. Targeted focus and increased support should be placed on working with African women's groups;

Strong emphasis should be placed on supporting programs to return and rehabilitate trafficking victims, including educational, training and job development programs;

Public and private organizations should develop programs to build awareness in the US of Trafficking in African Women and Children;

In the US, establish an institute and/or research center focused primarily on studying and developing reliable data on Trafficking in African Women and Children (possibly at one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities with a corresponding school of higher education in Africa).

Mr. Chairman, again I thank you for this opportunity to contribute these remarks.